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ABSTRACT

The goal of the "Best Practices Initiative: Characteristics of Programs of Information Literacy that Illustrate Best Practices," undertaken by the Association of College and Research Libraries' Institute for Information Literacy is to systematically identify and test the key elements essential for a successful institutionally supported information literacy program. Phase One of the three-part program was a conceptual phase in which the challenge was to develop a set of characteristics that, at least theoretically, should be present in all successful instruction programs. The end result of the process was the publication of "Working Edition of Best Practices" (March 2001), which identifies 10 categories of best practices that should be considered in assessing an academic information literacy program. Three of the characteristics deal directly with issues of program design and delivery. The focus of this paper is on examining these categories and characteristics in relation only to the librarian-as-teacher. The first of these librarian-as-teacher categories is "articulation with the curriculum." The second best is "collaboration with classroom faculty." The third and final best practice is focused on "pedagogy." (AEF)

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"What the ACRL Institute for Information Literacy Best Practices Initiative tells us about the librarian as teacher"

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How many times have you heard the same institution's information literacy program cited as an exemplar in the field? How many times have you wondered why a particular information literacy program at an institution works so well, while others never really take hold? How many times have you thought about whether you had all the right ingredients at hand to shape an effective information literacy program? How many times have you thought about what makes a quality information literacy program? Ironically, we all seem to "know" a good information literacy program when we "see" one, but are less clear on what makes it so. Unfortunately, to date, there has been scant attention to the critical components that comprise a successful and sustainable program.

In response to this existing vacuum, the Association of College & Research Libraries' Institute for Information Literacy undertook the "Best Practices Initiative: Characteristics of Programs of Information Literacy that Illustrate Best Practices." The project's goal is to systematically identify and test the key elements essential for a successful institutionally supported information literacy program. Institutionalizing information literacy programs is one of the known components of successful programs; it requires all facets of the college or university—the administration, the classroom faculty, and the librarians—to embrace the concept of information literacy. Therefore, it is the institution, rather than the individual, that "Best Practices" is specifically designed to address.

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The "Best Practices Initiative" was one of the three initial projects that the Institute for Information Literacy targeted for development. In 1999, the Institute for Information Literacy was founded as part of the Association of College & Research Libraries, a division of the American Library Association. The Institute is dedicated to playing a leadership role in assisting individuals and institutions in integrating information literacy throughout the full spectrum of the education process.[i] Its goals are broad based:

- prepare librarians to become effective teachers of information literacy programs;
- support librarians and other educators and administrators in playing leadership roles in the development and implementation of information literacy programs;
- forge new relationships throughout the educational community to work toward information literacy curriculum development;
- offer opportunities for growth and development in the changing field of information literacy.

The "Best Practices Initiative" directly embodies and reflects two of the Institute's goals. First, "Best Practices" calls upon the expertise of librarians and educators to work together to create a new framework for information literacy. "Best Practices" has forged new relationships throughout the educational community during the initiative's development and testing phases, specifically relationships with classroom faculty and academic administrators. Second, the "Best Practices Initiative" is providing leadership to the educational community through its goal of establishing and testing the theory of best practices for information literacy. Although I hesitate to prejudge the ultimate outcomes of the "Best Practices Initiative," my educated guess is that it will provide educational communities a set of institutional building blocks that will enable different academic constituencies to better design, assess, and implement information literacy programs.

The "Best Practices Initiative" asks a simple question: Is there a unique set of criteria that exists for all effective information literacy programs despite the differences in the types and sizes of institutions? To answer this question, the "Best Practices Initiative" Project Director (and driving force behind this project), Tom Kirk from Earlham College (The information literacy program at Earlham is widely viewed as one of the most successful information literacy programs in the United States), proposed a three-part program to investigate the question.[ii]

Phase I was a conceptual phase. In this phase, the challenge was to develop a set of characteristics that, at least theoretically, should be present in all successful instruction programs. To accomplish phase I, a project management team of eight academic instruction librarians, instructional technologists and classroom faculty was constituted. The project management team was supplemented by a broader-based advisory group of sixteen professionals. They worked collaboratively for twelve months, employing the Delphi technique, to craft the initial draft of "Best Practices." This draft was then made available to the information literacy community at large for input and comment. Fifty-three individuals took advantage of that opportunity and provided over two hundred additional contributions. The end result of the process was the publication of Working Edition of Best Practices, issued in March 2001.[iii]

The Working Edition of Best Practices identifies ten categories of best practices that should be considered in assessing an academic information literacy program. As you might suspect, these traits cover a broad spectrum of concerns. They range from having a mission statement for information literacy programs to assessing the outcomes of the program. Three of the characteristics, 30% of the best practices identified, deal directly with issues of program design and delivery. My selection of these particular categories might be viewed as somewhat arbitrary, since all of the characteristics involve librarians to one degree or another. However, separating the administrative structure of programs inherent in such categories as mission statements, goals and objectives, assessment, etc., from the qualities of designing and delivering instruction leaves three categories that directly address pedagogy and curriculum development.

While I am examining these three categories through the lens of librarian-as-teacher, it is critical to understand that the "Best Practices" is not intended to be used exclusively by or applied exclusively to librarians. Rather it is intended to be a document that speaks to the best practices in an information literacy program regardless of who initiates the program or teaches in the program. Seen from this perspective, the three categories I have selected, "Articulation with the Curriculum" "Collaboration with Classroom Faculty" and "Pedagogy," provide a basis for broad discussion and interaction between librarians and disciplinary faculty. The focus of this paper, however, is examining these categories and characteristics in relation only to the librarian-as-teacher.

As I have read and thought about each of these, it has become clear that there are a series of underlying assumptions embedded in the characteristics that amplify each category. These assumptions, I believe, need to be recognized by the librarian-as-teacher as a prelude to achieving best practices. In other words, "Best Practices Initiatives" cannot be implemented cookie cutter style. Rather, librarians need to first understand the implications behind them.

Let me begin with the first of these librarian-as-teacher categories, "articulation with the curriculum." This best practice initiative says, "Articulation with the curriculum for an information literacy program should

- be developed with and integrated into existing academic and vocational programs in collaboration with departments, rather than solely with individual faculty;
- place the emphasis on students learning in the context of other courses and subjects;
- use teaching methods most appropriate for the educational environment of the institution;
- integrate information skills literacy [sic] throughout a student's academic career rather than as a one-time experience;
- progress in complexity as students move through their academic experiences."[iv]

The first two characteristics assume that the instruction librarian is deeply familiar with the curriculum of the institution, its majors, minors, and, necessarily, individual courses that may lend themselves to information literacy. I, myself, came to recognize the importance of knowing this in a rather startling encounter early in my career. I was having lunch with a director of one of the University of Minnesota Libraries in 1982. I was working in the education/psychology/music/art library, so it was most appropriate for the director to ask me, "What is the focus of the psychology curriculum at the University—clinical or research?" It was clear he was testing me and I failed that test abysmally. Not only did I not have a clue, the very idea that this type of information should be relevant to my work came as a surprise. I was deeply embarrassed. But I instantly learned that understanding the institution's programs of study had to be the foundation for discussing, designing and teaching information literacy. Other disciplinary examples abound: is the education department focused on secondary or primary education, or both? Does the art department emphasize art history or studio art? Knowing differences exist, let alone what they are at a given school, presumes a level of disciplinary awareness on the part of the librarian. This is no simple task. At a minimum, this requires librarians to understand the scholarly information patterns in different disciplines in order to determine the bibliographic structure of a discipline. In addition, librarians must be keen observers of curriculum developments on their campuses. Ideally, librarians should be actively involved in the institutional governance process that oversees curriculum, and take the time and make the effort to regularly interact with colleagues outside the library.

These characteristics also presuppose that the instruction librarian understands the risk of developing a program based merely on personal relationships. Regrettably, this happens all too often. A typical scenario finds instruction librarians developing strong working relationships with a host of individual classroom faculty. They consult on integrating information literacy assignments, they team-teach, and

they even grade work together. However, it is impossible to sustain an information literacy program on personal relationships. Indeed, such personal relationships do not constitute a program. Rather sustainable information literacy programs must have an institutional mandate, commitment and structure. This allows the players to change, but the program to remain.

The "Best Practices Initiative" identifies the institution or departments' philosophy of teaching as a critical element to success. Underlying this is an assumption that librarians must first recognize that different pedagogies exist and second that individual departments or schools might have adopted a specific pedagogical technique. For instance, does the business school use a case study approach? If so, would it be beneficial for the instruction librarian to adopt this approach as well? Are there institutional commitments to including gender and diversity in the curriculum? If so, would it be beneficial for an instruction librarian to do the same? Is active learning an explicit institutional goal? If so, what are the benefits to adopting an active learning model for information literacy? If information literacy is to be woven into the curricula, then its presentation should be part of the fabric of existing pedagogical frameworks.

"Articulation with the curriculum" presupposes that front line instruction librarians be aware and sensitive to the curricular components and teaching philosophies of their institutions in general and individual schools and departments in specific. In so doing, the librarian's goals become synchronized with the educational goals of the institution/school/department and thus librarians become a full partner in delivering educational content.

The second best practice addressing the librarian-as-teacher is "Collaboration with Classroom Faculty." According to "Best Practices," "collaboration between classroom faculty, librarians and other program staff in an information literacy program should

- foster communication within the academic community to garner support for an information literacy program;
- result in a process that includes all groups in planning, pedagogy, assessment, course/curriculum, and assignment development aspects of the information literacy program;
- occur whether the information literacy effort resides in a separate credit-bearing course or in discipline-based courses;
- occur before a course syllabus is constructed and distributed;
- provide a mechanism for continuous improvement of the program;
- foster the development of lifelong learning skills."[v]

There are a significant number of assumptions inherent in this category. I am only going to touch on a few, especially since some of these characteristics share assumptions. Perhaps the most obvious assumption was articulated by one of the respondents to the initial draft of this set of characteristics. She said that the most challenging aspect of this category was "Honoring different disciplinary perspectives and understanding that information literacy needed to be defined by faculty through their disciplinary lenses so that they own it." This requires instruction librarians to understand the basic structural differences among disciplines in terms of how information is generated, shared, published and captured by bibliographic tools. Recognizing that disciplines have unique information/publication structures provides an excellent foundation for an exchange between librarian and classroom faculty member about integrating information literacy into disciplinary content.[vi]

Additionally, in an effort to work collaboratively with classroom faculty, instruction librarians must recognize that faculty may need assistance in recognizing how their assignments assume a level of information literacy that their students do not possess. In standard workshops offered to classroom faculty

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at my institution, for instance, the instruction librarian requests faculty to bring a typical assignment they have given their students. Through an analysis of the assignment by the instruction librarian and instructor, faculty members realize how their assumptions potentially impede a student's ability to complete the task successfully or at least in the manner the faculty member envisioned when designing the assignment. For instance, the faculty member who gave his class an assignment "Write a research paper on some aspect of the Sherpa culture in Nepal" is making a host of assumptions about students' information seeking, accessing and evaluating skills. In this assignment, the instructor first assumes students can effectively narrow their research topic to a specific area of Sherpa culture, and then that students can match their focus to a disciplinary perspective, i.e. the economy of sherpa culture, the sociology of sherpa culture, the role of women in Sherpa culture, etc. But this is not the end of the process. If the student gets this far in developing the search query, the instructor then assumes students can determine what type of materials they need to locate, books, articles, government documents, etc. This is followed by an assumption that students can match disciplinary perspectives and types of materials needed with the huge, perhaps even overwhelming, number of print and electronic resources available. If an instruction librarian can successfully walk a faculty member through an explication of an assignment, the faculty member then understands the need for explicit information literacy instruction. Taking this approach with assignments created by faculty lays the groundwork for librarian and faculty member to work together in both constructing assignments and planning for information literacy. This leads to a mutual recognition of the mastery of information systems by librarian and rightfully respects mastery of subject content by classroom faculty.

The final characteristic I want to highlight is "foster[ing] the development of lifelong learning skills." The abundance of information now available digitally and the rapidly changing interfaces to this information has done much to underscore the need for continuing instruction in information literacy for both classroom faculty and students (and let's not forget librarians). The tools, the resources, and the interrelationship of information is changing so rapidly that students moving through their academic careers and into the workforce need to understand the ongoing need for a lifetime of learning. While the basic concepts, and perhaps even competencies, of information literacy may remain relatively stable, the access framework will undergo significant changes. Recognizing the inevitability of this requires that continuing education be a key message of information literacy.

The third and final best practice pertinent to the librarian-as-teacher is focused on pedagogy. According to this category, "Pedagogy for an information literacy program should

- adopt a diverse, multi-disciplinary approach to teaching and learning;
- encompass critical thinking and reflection;
- support student-centered learning;
- include active and collaborative learning activities;
- build on the existing knowledge that students bring into the classroom;
- incorporate variations in learning and teaching styles;
- involve various combinations of teaching and learning techniques for individuals and groups;
- include collaboration with classroom faculty and student researchers;
- relate information literacy to on-going course work;
- experiment with a wide variety of methods."[vii]

The underlying assumption of pedagogy as a best practice is that instruction librarians are knowledgeable, conversant, and comfortable with pedagogical techniques in general and information

literacy techniques in particular. An emphasis on pedagogy and learning theory is not normally part of the library science master's program, anymore than it is a part of the curriculum for doctoral candidates in most fields. Yet, it is perhaps the most critical component for translating theory into practical application. The larger the range of pedagogical techniques available to an instruction librarian, the more versatile an instruction librarian can be in responding to a variety of teaching opportunities. This best practice recognizes the need for the instruction librarian to learn and then draw upon learning theory and pedagogical techniques to deliver the substance of information literacy competencies in creative and innovative ways.

Realistically, no single person is capable of knowing or mastering all aspects of pedagogy—theory, design, and delivery. Yet, as challenging as this may seem, the instruction librarian should have a working knowledge of the concepts that underscore pedagogy. Applying that knowledge can directly contribute to the success or failure of an instructional moment, an instructional class, or an instructional course. The information literacy literature today is rich in material that addresses the importance of learning theory as a base for building instructional programs, as well as the application of theory to practice.[viii] Today's instruction librarian must draw upon this literature and add to it.

Recognizing these assumptions and addressing their implications are not sufficient. The central question remains: do these articulated best practices--articulation with the curriculum, collaboration with classroom faculty, and pedagogy—need to be present to have a successful information literacy program? To answer that question, the "Best Practices Initiative" embarked on phase II. This testing and refining phase was designed as a national invitational conference of institutions. Institutions were invited to apply for selection based on the congruence of their information literacy programs with the Working Edition of Best Practice characteristics.[ix] A call for participation was issued in Fall 2001; ten institutions were subsequently selected for participation in the June 2002 conference.[x] The institutions represented ranged from two-year community colleges to doctoral degree granting institutions, from large public university systems to small private colleges.

Each institution sent a team made up of a librarian, a classroom faculty member and an academic administrator to the conference. They shared the specific best practices modeled at their institution, and assessed the usability of these models for their institutions. The June conference was a working conference and the goal was to discuss, explore, examine, and explicate the best practices characteristics against the background of information literacy programs. The end result will be the production of a revised set of best practices.[xi]

Having completed Phase I, the initial identification of best practice characteristics, and Phase II, the national invitational conference, the final phase of the Best Practices Initiative, which is focused on outcomes, is poised to begin. This will highlight model programs or program that exemplify selected "Best Practices." Description of these programs and the specific characteristics they exemplify will be documented and disseminated. More importantly, however, once a revised set of best practices is promulgated, they can be effectively used as a basis for assessing information literacy programs in general, as well as specific aspects of instructional programs.

The three categories that most directly apply to librarian-as-teacher, those focused on teaching and instructional significant, should bear significant weight in our profession. If they are going to be embraced by the profession, then the assumptions behind those characteristics must also be understood. The practical application could, or perhaps I should say will prompt curricular change in graduate library education, inform professional development programs, such as the Institute for Information Literacy's Immersion program[xii], and appear as job qualifications and expectations for the librarian-as-teacher. Most importantly, these "Best Practices" challenge us as librarians to uncover the assumptions that may not be initially recognized in the seeming simplicity of the "Best Practices'" statements. Understanding the complexity of these statements is the key to shaping the librarian-as-teacher.

[i] To read more about the original idea for the Institute for Information Literacy see Oberman, Cerise. 1998. "Why We Need a National Information Literacy Institute," *Theory and Practice*, ed. Linda Shirato & Elizabeth Bucciarelli. (Ann Arbor: 1998), 1. See also, Oberman, Cerise. 1998. "The Institute for Information Literacy," *C&RL News*, 59(9): 703.

[ii] See Kirk, Thomas. "Best Practices and Assessment of Information Literacy Programs." http://www.earlham.edu/~libr/Plan.htm. [2002, June 14] for the full proposal.

[iii] See http://www.ala.org/acrl/nili/criteria.html for the March 2001 *Working Edition of the Characteristics of Programs of Information Literacy that Illustrates Best Practices* [2002, June 14]

[iv] http://www.ala.org/acrl/nili/criteria.html [2002, June 14]

[v] http://www.ala.org/acrl/nili/criteria.html [2002, June 14]

[vi] See Keresztesi, Michael. 1982. "The Science of Bibliography: Theoretical Implications for Bibliographic Instruction," *Theories of Bibliographic Instruction: Designs for Teaching*. 1982. Eds. Cerise Oberman & Katina Strauch. NY, Bowker, for a structural framework on the relationship between discipline development and bibliographic control.

[vii] http://www.ala.org/acrl/nili/criteria.html [2002, June 14]

[viii]See Grassian, Esther S. & Kaplowitz, Joan R. 2001. *Information Literacy Instruction: Theory and Practice*. NY: Neal-Schuman, for an overview of learning theory, learning styles, critical thinking and active learning.

[ix]The application for the Best Practices Invitational Conference can be viewed at http://www.ala.org/acrl/nili/bestprac.html [2002, June 14]

[x]The institutions selected for participation were Austin Community College, Texas; California State University Fullerton, Elmhurst College, Illinois; James Madison University, Virginia; Minneapolis Community & Technical College, Minnesota; Ohio State University; University at Albany/State University of New York; Wartburg College, Iowa; Weber State University, Utah; Zayed University, United Arab Emirates.

[xi]As an invited speaker and participant in the Invitational Best Practices Conference, my intention is to share the results of the conference at my IFLA presentation in August 2002. I will be able, at that point to comment specifically on how the three librarian-as-teacher best practice categories faired.

[xii] The Institute for Information Literacy's Immersion program is the Institute's core professional development program. It offers a curriculum of intensive training and education (4.5 days) for instruction librarians in two tracks: Track I is designed for academic librarians interested in personal development in the area of instruction; Track II is designed for librarians who have leadership responsibilities for information literacy programs at their institution. The Immersion curriculum focuses on theory, pedagogy, and politics of information literacy programs. Since 1999, over 600 instruction librarians from around the world have participated in the Immersion program. For additional information on the Immersion program see http://www.ala.org/acrl/nili/nilihp.html [2002, June 14]

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